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## Re-figuring Liu Xie's Carpet: on the Rhetoric of the *Wenxin diaolong*

Dinu LUCA\*

### Abstract

This paper analyzes and provides an alternative reading of several essential terms (*gangling*, *maomu*, and *shuniu*) around which Liu Xie famously articulates his vision on the structure of his *Wenxin diaolong*. It first examines how these key expressions produce contradictory projections when read non-figuratively; next it revisits their occurrences in earlier texts and proposes, in the case of *shuniu*, a significantly different reading; finally it explores the intricate intersections and rearrangements the “re-figuring” of these terms leads to. It suggests that respecting a text's fundamental figurality should be seen as a prerequisite for accurate, nuanced and in-depth investigations.

**Keywords:** Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong*, figure, *shuniu*

Apart from the occasional text proposing yet another rearrangement of the chapters in Liu Xie's 劉勰 *Wenxin diaolong* 文心彫龍 (*WXDL*), one does not commonly find, among the numerous hotly debated issues in contemporary “dragonology,”<sup>1</sup> much discussion dedicated to the structure of Liu's work. In this regard, things seem strangely controversy-free: in his *WXDL* dictionary (1996), for example, Zhou Zhenfu fails to even list the division of the text among the “contentious issues” of current research, mentioning primarily the formal presentation of the *WXDL* – that of a text that has historically circulated as a ten-*juan* 卷 book, with each *juan* including five *pian* 篇, to a total of 50. Like most

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\* Dinu Luca, Assistant Professor, GIECT, National Taiwan Normal University. E-mail: dinu.luca@ntnu.edu.tw.

<sup>1</sup> Several excellent state-of-the-field surveys are available, including Zhou 1996, Zhang and Wang 2001.

other critics interested in the matter, Zhou makes the mandatory reference to Liu Xie's own detailed description of the structure of his text in the book's closing chapter, the "Xuzhi" 序志 or "Ordering (my) intentions." Different as this account makes the *WXDL* look from its actual 50-chapter arrangement, on the one hand, and quite complex and contradictory as it appears upon closer examination, on the other, the view provided by this description seems to guide many contemporary approaches to the text. Exploring parts of the relevant paragraphs anew, suggesting the importance of a different (figural) reading of Liu's vision with regard to the structure of the *WXDL* – re-figuring it, as it were – and discussing the implications of its figurality are the goals of this paper.

Before we proceed, one further remark is in order: all readings built around auctorial statements fall of necessity, of course, in the debated realm of intentionalism. Countless theoretical matters raise their head here and pose serious challenges to anyone daring enough to ignore controversies that have polarized and divided scholars since at least the days of Wimsatt and Beardsley. In this context, I hasten to promise I will not suggest, on the basis of Liu Xie's **words**, a new reading of Liu Xie's **text**, but rather a new reading of Liu's **vision** of his own text. The degree the two correspond, if they do or, more significantly, if this correspondence can be made in the first place, are questions well beyond the scope of this article.

Liu's description of his book appears in one well-known extended paragraph in the "Xuzhi," the last chapter in the *WXDL*. It runs as follows:

蓋文心之作也，本乎道，師乎聖，體乎經，酌乎緯，變乎騷，**文之樞紐，亦云極矣**。若乃論文敘筆，則固別區分，原始以表末，釋名以章義，選文以定篇，敷理以舉統，**上篇以上，綱領明矣**。至於割情析采，籠圈條貫，摘神性，圖風勢，苞會通，閱聲字，崇替於時序，褒貶於才略，惛悞於知音，耿介於程器，**長懷序志，以馭群篇，下篇以下，毛目顯矣**。位理定名，彰乎大易之數，其為文用，四十九篇而已。

[My] work on the heart of literature takes root in the "Dao," a master in the "Sage" and a body in the "Classics," it scoops from the "Apocrypha" and changes with the "Sorrow" – [these are] the *shuniu* of literature, that is [its] pole.

With regard to discoursing on the rhymed and treating of the unrhymed [texts], the domains have been differentiated and the areas separated: I have traced the beginnings in order to show the continuations, explicated the names in order to clarify the meanings, chosen the [representative] texts to establish the [norms for all] compositions, and expounded the structure in

order to bring out the unifying thread – in the case of the upper chapters, the *gangling* is clear.

As for cutting out feelings and dissecting colours, I have surrounded and enclosed the [inner] orderly strings: I have expounded on the “Spirit” and “Nature,” sketched the “Wind” and “Dynamics,” integrated the “Union” and “Going Through,” and investigated “Sounds” and “Graphs”; rise and fall [have been discussed] in “Time and Order”; praise and blame, in “Overview of Talent”; sadness and grief, in “The Knower of Sounds”; anger and annoyance,<sup>2</sup> in “Showing the Vessel”; and those long harboured, in “Ordering [My] Intentions,” meant to drive the herd of the [other] chapters – in the case of the lower chapters, the *maomu* is apparent.

Establishing principles and setting up names are made manifest in the numbers of the great *Change*: out of these [fifty], only forty-nine chapters are used in relation to *wen*.<sup>3</sup>

My discussion will concentrate primarily on the passages in bold in the Chinese text above (the underlined sequence will also be addressed in passing). I first refer to the three shorter contexts – those featuring the expressions (better left untranslated for the moment) *shuniu* 樞紐, *gangling* 綱領 and *maomu* 毛目; a more extended discussion will follow with reference to the longer context that closes Liu’s paragraph.

None of the three terms mentioned above is seen as particularly problematic by researchers, classical, modern or contemporary alike. They are usually read, respectively, as “hub” or “crux” (*shuniu*), “guiding principle, guideline, program” (*gangling*) and “minute details” (*maomu*), with common paraphrases (or rather dis-figurations) like “general principles” (for *shuniu*) and “detailed catalogue” (for *maomu*) taking over in many contemporary texts. All of these terms seem to be primarily seen as long dead metaphors, whose figurality is acknowledged, albeit indirectly, only by the immediately accessible paraphrases offered in their stead in contemporary translations of Liu’s text.

These operations of dis-figuration are commonplace at the level of the whole *WXDL*, maybe because dragonologists, while often caught in arguments with regard to the text’s fundamental status, do seem to agree at least on one aspect, i.e. the *WXDL*’s essential authority as a theoretical metatext. Given that position, most

<sup>2</sup> Translation here is based on Yang Mingzhao (2001: 459).

<sup>3</sup> For Chinese text, cf. Zhang 1995: 317–321. For renditions into contemporary Chinese, comments and discussions, cf. *inter alia* Xiang 1984, Zhan 1989, Long 1992, Zu 1993, Lu and Mou 1995, Wang and Zhou 1998, Zhang 1995 and Yang 2001. My understanding of these paragraphs has also been shaped by the work of Tu 1997, Huang 2000, Lu 2000, Wang and Kong 2001, and Ling 2006, as well as Shih 1959, Owen 1992, Wong *et al* 1999, and Yang 2003.

hermeneutical endeavours make it their duty to pare the webbed toes and extra fingers (to paraphrase Liu Xie paraphrasing Zhuangzi) of the *WXDL*: they explain away all figures with a view to emphasizing clarity and, more than anything else, the systematic orderliness for which the text is so celebrated.

But figures are dangerous creatures. Treacherous, unstable, always slippery textual beings, they will not disappear because we will them into nothingness or because we forget that metatexts are also (and primarily) texts themselves. Moreover, figures are the perfect masters of disguise: they may seem dead, but in fact they just lurk in the dark, waiting for the right moment to come and take over long-established meanings, like unwelcome guests in the house of sense. These ultimate parasites (to echo J. Hillis Miller's *The Critic as Host*, 1977) are also the ultimate manipulators: it is from them that interpretation proceeds most often and so it is around them that many a hermeneutic battle has been fought. Therefore, it is often in their realm of presence and absence, to appeal to a celebrated Pascalian formula,<sup>4</sup> that theories construct and deconstruct themselves; it is also in this insecure space, where beauty and meaning, aesthetics and logic, and grammar and rhetoric make and unmake texts and metatexts alike, that we now need to operate.

A good starting point could be provided by Yang Mingzhao's (2001: 459) annotation on *maomu*. Yang notices that *gangling* and *maomu* are frequently associated, and quotes four contexts – one from the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子, two from the *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 and one from the *Hongmingji* 弘明集:

操綱領以整毛目。 (Baopuzi, wai 5)

舉其綱領，略其毛目。 (Nan Qi shu 46)

綱領既理，毛目自張。 (Nan Qi shu 54)

振領持綱，舒張毛目。 (Hongmingji 10)

In all of Yang's examples, figurative derivation proceeds from the basic meanings of the terms, to wit "head-rope" (for *gangling*) and "tiny eyes" (*maomu*), in connection to a fishing net. Earlier uses of the image of the net in such metaphorical fashion with reference to politics or morals are numerous, and passages from texts as different as the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 or Huan Tan's 桓

<sup>4</sup> "Figure porte absence et présence..." Pascal (2004), *Pensées*, fragment 265/296.

譚 *Xinlun* 新論 (where *gang* 綱 and *mu* 目 are also paired together) can easily come to mind:

用民有紀有綱，壹引其紀，萬目皆起，壹引其綱，萬目皆張。 (*Lüshi chunqiu* 19.4)

舉綱以綱，千目皆張；振裘持領，萬毛自整。治大國者亦當如此。 (*Xinlun* 11)

However, my concern here is not the identification of the metaphorical fields where these passages could be inscribed. I am rather interested in pointing out the complementarity built by these figures in the passages above as well as Liu's "Xuzhi" context. Just like a net is made up of head-ropes and tiny eyes, so too, Liu would have us think, is the *WXDL*. In the passage under analysis here, therefore, the relevant contexts would read: "...in the case of the upper chapters, the head-ropes [of my net] are clear" and, respectively, "...in the case of the lower chapters, the tiny eyes [of my net] are apparent." Also, just like the head-ropes order the tiny eyes, controlling the opening of the net, so do, we are to understand, the upper chapters of Liu's text orient the lower sections of the *WXDL*.

I would like to leave for strong intentionalists the discussion with regard to the relative significance, in Liu's eyes, of the two halves of his book (and the consequences that accepting Liu's hierarchy would imply for all those who nowadays privilege so much the more "theoretical" second half of the *WXDL*), and rather further emphasize a different aspect. For most classical and modern scholars (Ye Lianfang, Cao Xuequan, or Fan Wenlan), (Li in Yang 1995: 87) as well as (with some differences in terms of stress and nuance) for many contemporary critics (Zhang Yan, Peng Qinghuan, Wang Jinling, etc.) (Zhuo 2004: 4–7), it seems clear from Liu's passage that we are dealing with a two-part text, made up of upper and lower chapters – and this, once again, in spite of the actual circulation of the *WXDL* as a ten-juan, five-pian-per-juan book. Most contemporary researchers such as Zhou Zhenfu (1996: 553–554), however, also insist, again on the basis of Liu's instructions in the "Xuzhi," that one further subdivision should be made, leading to an image of the *WXDL* as a four-part composition made of sections of unequal length. Thus, the first five chapters, often named by contemporary readers, in keeping with Liu's own formula, the "crux" (literally, the "pivot and the knot," *shuniu* 樞紐) of the *WXDL*, represent the first part. The next group of twenty chapters includes sections 6 to 25, which are dedicated to a wide

variety of literary genres, often duly counted and listed. A third group is made up of chapters 26 to 49; this is sometimes further subdivided (leading, as discussed by scholars such as Li Miao (1995), or Zhuo Guojun (2004), to a five-, six- or even seven-part *WXDL*) or has its chapters rearranged according to what appear as more fitting criteria. Finally, one last part is made up of the “Xuzhi” chapter itself.

It is worth repeating that dragonologists are often busy debating other things, but not (or at least not too intensely) the divisions of the *WXDL* advanced by Liu. A second glance, however, reveals that things are not as clear as they seem. Let us first notice that the two-part division is problematic for a variety of reasons, the most obvious being the separate grouping of the first five chapters under the *shuniu* label: these are, in fact, discussed **outside** the group of the “upper chapters” and their outline ends with a concluding pronouncement that is quite similar<sup>5</sup> to those commenting on the upper and lower chapters below. This has led researchers who notice the paragraph's symmetries to opt for a tripartite structure of the text – the *shuniu*, the upper and the lower chapters. It is important to note here that earlier ternary divisions (advanced by, inter alia, the compilers of the *Sikuquanshu jianmingmulu* 四庫全書簡明目錄, Luo Genze or Zhou Xunchu) (cf. Li in Yang 1995: 87) separated the text into the upper and the lower chapters, and the “Xuzhi.”

The positioning of this last chapter is in fact more ambiguous: it is included among the “lower chapters” (it is the last to be mentioned in their group)<sup>6</sup> and yet it is also separated from them (and the rest of the book). This separation seems to be achieved first through the chapter's figuration as a kind of “whip” or maybe “shepherd” driving the other chapters (以馭群篇). Thus the “Xuzhi”, as we will discuss below, could be seen as fulfilling a primarily intra-textual function; it is also, in fact, the only chapter in Liu's list said to have any function whatsoever. However, this unique status can be questioned, and for contemporary dragonologists such as Guo Jinxi, or Zhang Changqing and Zhang Huien, for instance, the figure of the “whip” applies to the last five chapters of the text (see underlined parts in the passage above): this of course leads to quite a different four-part division of the *WXDL*. (cf. Li in Yang 1995: 87) No matter what we decide about this matter, the strange ending of Liu's paragraph we are focusing on here does seem to imply, as we shall see below, that the “Xuzhi” is a kind of

<sup>5</sup> 亦云極矣 as compared to 綱領明矣 and 毛目顯矣.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. above the underlined part in Liu's passage under analysis here.

supplement whose presence, in good Derridean fashion, is necessary but which needs erasure for reading to proceed.

How are we to disentangle Liu's masterfully crafted net? And how many parts does Liu Xie in fact state the *WXDL* contains? Are the first five chapters to be included among the "upper chapters," or are they a separate category – an upper beyond the upper? What about the "Xuzhi"? These are all questions that will concern us below.

In this context a discussion of the *shuniu* as a figure may be useful. Let us first notice that commentators usually highlight the connotations of centrality that both *shu* 樞 ("axis," "pivot") and *niu* 紐 ("knot") evoke, just like the binomial term resulting from their combination (*shuniu* as "hub," "central, essential factor," as dictionaries define it). Yet few if any readers notice the bizarre spatialization that this figure of centrality occupies when discussed against the upper-and-lower division: whatever we decide about the *shuniu* chapters (1–5), the question remains if the centre they refer to in this reading of the text should be placed **in front of** the upper. With the centre thus understood as somewhere else but the middle, Liu's text assumes a radical unbalance that fits poorly with the paeans of orderliness that it has often occasioned. Some contemporary readings manifestly assume this unbalance, focusing on the *shuniu* as a high priority textual area and then reading selectively the rest of the text (often only several lower chapters, those that are perceived as theoretically more challenging).

All of this follows naturally from the interpretation of the phrase *shuniu*, constantly read, as mentioned above, as a "crux" or "key" – the "crux" of the *WXDL* and the "key" to its understanding, the "hub" of the text. Such reading is validated historically, seems to be confirmed by the other use of the expression in the *WXDL*<sup>7</sup> and is also in keeping with present-day usage.

This is nevertheless not very adequate, I believe. There seem to be no extant texts earlier than the *WXDL* in which *shuniu* is used in the manner commentators usually understand it today.<sup>8</sup> In the very limited contexts it does appear, this binomial construction has an exclusively astronomical referent – the "Celestial Pivot" (*tianshu* 天樞) or the "Knot Star" (*niuxing* 紐星), a small star (4339

<sup>7</sup> In chapter 24, we find the following about the genre of *yi* 議 or "opinion": 故其大體所資，必樞紐經典，采故實于前代，觀通變于當今。

<sup>8</sup> The only other occurrence with the word used in this sense is in the *Nan Qi shu* 28, a text produced by one of Liu's contemporaries, Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489–537).

Camelopardi) in the Beiji 北極 or “Northern Pole” constellation which was also “the pole-star of the Han.” (cf. Needham 1959: 261) It was often associated in various Han and later texts with the Yellow Emperor 黃帝, as corroborated by his alternate name of “Container of the Pivot and the Knot” 含樞紐; the Emperor is otherwise known as the “Spiritual Dipper.” 神斗 (cf. Nienhauser 2002: 224–225)<sup>9</sup> Reading in this direction – *shuniu* as “pole star,” or “guiding star” – also makes better sense semantically in Liu's context (文之樞紐，亦云極矣); moreover, it may indeed perhaps explain how there can be something that is “upper beyond the upper” in Liu's text.

In the alternative spatialization that I am imagining here, the first five chapters of the text, just like the “Xuzhi” itself, are not figured on the same plane as the rest: they are of the text, yet somehow above it, like the pole-star and, respectively, like a whip (in the case of the “Xuzhi”), guiding or driving all not from behind but rather from above. The reasons for this inclusion/exclusion – or rather, after abandoning all the spatial connotations of the *shang/xia* pair, vertical positioning versus linear continuum – are different in each case. The “Xuzhi,” as we shall see in detail below, is both the *WXDL*'s own metatext, where the text takes its distance to itself, and the paratextual supplement that the text does not need, but without which it cannot reach completion. On the other hand, the “constellation” (to use a figure of my own) of the *shuniu* chapters treats of the very “root” and “trunk” of *wen* – of *wen* as related to the Dao, the sages, and the Classics, of *wen* from a time and of a quality that set it apart from multiplicity and inexorable degeneration, as discussed by Liu in detail from chapter 6 on.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For the associations mentioned here, most information comes from texts quoted in *Shiji* 史記 (see for instance the *Suoyin* 索引 and *Zhengyi* 正義 ad *Benji* 本紀 1, the *Zhengyi* ad *Benji* 12, etc.), *Hanshu* 漢書 (Yan Shigu 顏師古 ad *juan* 25 *shang* – the *Jiaosizhi* 郊祀志) or *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (ad *Benji* 2) commentaries, such as the *Shangshu diming yan* 尚書帝命驗 or Liu Xiang's 劉向 lost *Wujing tongyi* 五經通義. The *Tianwenzhi* 天文志 in the *Jinshu* 晉書 also discusses the Yellow Emperor as a star sitting in the “Supreme Minuteness” 太微 polar area (黃帝坐在太微中，含樞紐之神也). The *Weishu* 魏書 (*liezhuan* 79) quotes a “Rhapsody on Contemplating the Images” 觀象賦 that develops the same image. Cf. also Knechtges (1996: 34) and Goodman (1998: 103).

<sup>10</sup> That the same *wen* also includes the lush, exaggerated, “exotically” religious Southern Tradition of Qu Yuan (which Liu discusses in his chapter 5) and, more than anything else, the fake and despised “Apocrypha” (Liu's chapter 4) of Han times, dedicated to portents, omens, divination and speculation of all kinds, has made many a critic develop alternative theories, solutions or plain dismissals of Liu's arrangement. And yet, in each case for different reasons, it makes sense, I think, to include these two chapters as well in the *shuniu*; this however should be the subject of another paper.



The word “constellation” is not, in fact, an innocent figure (is there ever any?). I use it only speculatively here because, as is well-known, the pole-star according to the celebrated Confucian expression (*Analects* 2.1) centres the stars around it and polarizes the heavens. In doing so it carries all the associations of “core,” “nucleus,” or “focus” of *shuniu*; however, the ideas of distance and difference may not come out very exactly if we appropriate the usual translation for *shuniu*. “Constellation,” while less accurate, fits nicely with a different aspect: with the (Celestial) Pivot or the Knot (Star) seen in the classical view of the skies as part of a five-star Northern Pole constellation (cf. Needham 1959: 261), it is quite tempting to speculate on the equivalence between the number of stars and the number of chapters in Liu Xie’s grouping.

Even if we accept that the *shuniu* of Liu’s text does not designate its key or nucleus – and thus we do not see it as a kind of coagulation point like a hub around it the rest of the chapters gather, but rather as something that dominates the text from above, guiding the development of the other chapters – we still have a problem. It is not difficult to see that the alternative spatialization mentioned above makes sense with regard to the upper part of the *WXDL* and to it alone – the *shuniu* chapters being dedicated to the qualitatively different (by proximity with the Dao and association with the Sage, the Classics, etc.) “root” and “trunk” of *wen*, and chapters 6 to 25 treating of the different “branches” of the tree of *wen*. However, the tree metaphor works manifestly only for the first half of Liu’s text and does not seem to apply to the “lower chapters,” the “tiny eyes” or *maomu* in a different metaphorical context.

In light of all this, and taking into account that the net metaphor does nicely connect the two upper and lower parts of the *WXDL* in a coherent mesh, can we possibly see it to co-exist with this tree metaphor that can be easily demonstrated to articulate the first half (chapters 1 to 25) of Liu’s text? And since we are here, do all these figurations (the *shuniu*, the tree, the net) make any sense when seen from the numerological perspective (49 equally significant chapters dedicated to *wen* + 1) sketched in the final paragraph in Liu’s passage discussed here (位理定名，彰乎大易之數，其為文用，四十九篇而已)?

I think the answer to the first question clearly depends on our ability to accept the multiple planes that intersect in Liu’s vision. First, chapters 1 to 5 are set apart as qualitatively different, the “pole star” of the “upper chapters”; then, they belong with the “upper chapters” to the reticular world of *wen* as a tree, separated as they

are from them only in terms of quality and metaphysical proximity to the Dao and the Sage. Next, the upper chapters themselves make up, with the lower ones, which they guide as net-like “head-ropes,” the textual mesh of the *WXDL* (in this sense, to the degree they are part of the upper chapters, the *shuniu* also govern the lower chapters and thus the whole book). Last but not least, the whole is set apart from the “Xuzhi” – a sort of foreign body which both, it would seem, belongs and does not belong to the text.

With so much overlapping in terms of the exact areas covered by the profusion of figures put forth by Liu, suggesting clear-cut divisions in the text does not seem a productive endeavour. Moreover, Liu's own final pronouncement on the matter, coming as it does almost like an after-thought in the passage I zoom-in on in this paper, makes such divisions even more problematic. After all, Liu does set there all of the first 49 chapters of the *WXDL* as a coherent and compact corpus against the “Xuzhi,” making all oppositions and arrangements quite relative.

Moving on to the second question, I have already mentioned the strange regime of the “Xuzhi” in Liu's review. On the one hand, it is included among the lower chapters, and on the other it seems to be the subject of a special statement that comes almost like a postscript, after three somewhat symmetrical paragraphs that delineate the structure of the *WXDL* and with which it bears no formal resemblance. According to this statement, the “Xuzhi” seems to require exclusion from Liu's text.

Looking anew at Liu's first mentioning of the “Xuzhi” (長懷序志，以馭群篇), it should be pointed out that the figure of “driving” the “herd” of the other chapters is rarely, if ever, acknowledged as such in contemporary scholarship. Denied a figural status, the context yields somewhat banal readings that highlight the obvious fact that the “Xuzhi” (sometimes, as we have seen, taken together with the four previous chapters) closes the *WXDL*, coming as it does at the end of the book. Conversely, a figural reading would lead to a different positioning for the “Xuzhi” which, seen as the driver of the other chapters, could be figured as their “shepherd” or maybe their “whip”<sup>11</sup> – something that does not come behind the other sections, but rather above or beyond them. To put it differently, and in light of what comes next, as this text's *impossibly* co-present metatext.

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<sup>11</sup> The idea of a “textual whip” is particularly appealing when taking into account a line in Lu Ji's 陸機 *Wenfu* 文賦: 立片言而居要，乃一篇之警策。

But what are we to make in fact of the last passage? The paragraph alludes to a context in the *Xici* 繫辭 (A9) discussing the practice of the *yi* 易 divination. According to it, and in keeping with the “whip” figure already mentioned, the “Xuzhi”<sup>12</sup> inscribes itself somewhere both inside and outside the *WXDL* proper. It both belongs to the text (which it rounds off) and yet somehow stays out of it (as the 50<sup>th</sup> yarrow stalk that must be cast aside at the beginning of the divinatory process), thus both being and not being of the text. This chapter’s threshold status is best illustrated by the perfectly paradoxical fashion in which Wang Bi comments on the divination procedures alluded to above by Liu:

演天地之數，所賴者五十也，其用四十有九，則其一不用也。不用而用之以通，非數而數之以成，斯易之太極也。四十有九，數之極也。夫無不可以無明，必因於有，故常於有物之極，而必明其所由之宗也。(Lou 1980: II, 547–548)

In expanding the numbers of Heaven and Earth, we rely on fifty. Of these, we use forty-nine, so one is not used – not used, yet used to transmit, not a number, yet counted to reach completion: this is the ultimate pole of change, and forty-nine is the pole of all numbers. Nonbeing cannot be brought to light through nonbeing, it must follow being; therefore, always [staying] at the pole of those that have being, we will certainly bring to light the ancestor whence they come.<sup>13</sup>

“Not used, yet used, not a number, yet counted [in]” – this is exactly how and what the “Xuzhi” seems to be in the economy of the *WXDL*: this is the non-space where Liu, instead of treating of *wen*, as the rest of the *WXDL* purports to do, can talk mostly, with-in/out the *WXDL*, about the *WXDL* – and of course, about the *WXDL* talking about *wen*. Text and metatext can thus meet in the insecure space of paratext (fundamentally, the “Xuzhi” is, in terms of name, position and generic echoes, a postface) and thus make up the supplement which rounds off and needs then to be discarded.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Yuanhua (1979: 41–42) is, as far as I know, the only critic who would argue that the chapter that does not treat of *wen* in the *WXDL* is not the “Xuzhi”, but rather the “Yuan Dao” 原道, the first section in the *WXDL*. His argument, not widely accepted, does make sense, however, in view of the actual parallelism between divination and the structure of the *WXDL* constructed here by Liu: the 50<sup>th</sup> yarrow stalk is the first, in fact, to be cast aside.

<sup>13</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Lynn does not discuss this paragraph (which he included in his 1994 rendition of the *Yi* with Wang’s commentaries) in his article in Cai 2001. In Western studies, at least, Wang Bi’s comment does not seem to be often juxtaposed to Liu Xie’s passage; an exception is Fuehrer 2004: 72.

Space limitations prevent me from further exploring the implications of Liu's pronunciations on the "Xuzhi" and the ways in which fully acknowledging this chapter's paratextual status might lead to a significant reinterpretation of some of the text's often discussed perspectives. Suffice it to say here that I take this impossible duality connected to the status of the "Xuzhi" – the ultimate paradox (further enhanced, of course, by the fact that the "text" of the *WXDL* is, in turn, critical metatext) articulating this and many extended paratexts in the tradition – to be the essential condition necessary for Liu in order to conceive of his text as a "wholly other" critical metatext (other from the tradition – which he criticizes in a long paragraph in the same "Xuzhi" – and other from all generic categorization – what is, in fact, the genre of the *WXDL*?)<sup>14</sup>

All this, however, will not be developed here. In guise of conclusion for these lines, I prefer to make a plea not so much for the accuracy or relevance of the readings above, but rather for the basic assumption that motivates them: the *WXDL* is a work of *wen*, where figurality plays a major, structural part. One interpretation or another may be always accepted or rejected; but ignoring the figurative actuality of a text, and dis-figuring it in the name of metatextual clarity, seem to me to be hermeneutically untenable practices. In this sense, the contribution of this paper can best be seen as a re-figuration of Liu Xie's intricate texture or carpet – or rather as an invitation to reading.

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<sup>14</sup> For a longer discussion on these aspects, see Luca 2009.

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